

aberration but is the result of some physical interference or imperfection at the time of pigment deposition. The same lack of pigment in small areas of wing is frequently seen in the *Argynnis*idae.

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## A Visit to Skomer

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My sister and I intended to visit this small island off the coast of Pembrokeshire during 1st to the 6th of September, 1973. I had no idea what the lepidoptera would be like, but took a portable blacklight with me.

As it turned out, the 1st of September was a terrible day with lashing rain and howling winds and we were unable to cross to the island. We found a place to stay at St. Martin's Haven and I ran my trap on the cliffs. There was nothing interesting to record but I list the species taken since the traps we ran later on Skomer, only a short distance away, yielded completely different results. The moths recorded were *Luperina testacea* D. & S., *Diarsia rubi* View., *Gortyna micacea* Esp., *Pseudoterpna pruinata* Hufn., *Malacosoma neustria* L. and *Noctua pronuba* L. On the bracken surrounding the trap were several *Ceramica pisi* L. larvae.

The 2nd of September proved to be a glorious day, the wind having dropped and the skies cleared. While waiting for the boat to take us to the island, I saw my first *Vanessa cardui* L. for three years. The moment we landed on Skomer, *Eumenis semele* L. was observed and proved to be very common, but only at this one rock locality; on the other hand, *Pararge megera* L. was common both here and throughout the island. While walking to the chalets in the centre of the island, we saw *Lycaena*

*phlaeas* L., *Aglais urticae* L. and *Vanessa atalanta* L. Once again, the striking *C. pisi* larvae were numerous on the bracken and brambles.

In the afternoon, a heavy fog set in and the fog-horn started. This was the weather and sound we were going to become very familiar with during our stay. Even though the weather was so bad, I decided to put the trap out that evening. I chose a sheltered spot a quarter of a mile along the path leading to the Garland Stone. The vegetation was mixed, consisting of heather, bracken and bramble. Despite my placing it behind a wall, the wind was so gusty I had to weigh the sheet down with rocks. On the way back from setting the trap, I found the path was swarming with toads and frogs. There were so many it was impossible not to step on them. There were also numerous young shearwaters. These birds were still totally unable to fly and would rush off at your approach and dive noisily into the bracken. At one spot we were repeatedly "attacked" by a short-eared owl: no evening walk on the island was dull!

I was pleasantly surprised in the morning to find I had quite a large catch. Among the 21 species taken, *Paradiarsia glareosa* Esp. was the commonest and there were several *Gortyna flavago* D. & S., *Amathes agathina* Dup., *Antitype xanthomista* Hübn. and *Arenostola pygmina* Haw., together with a single *Euxoa obelisca* D. & S.—quite a promising start. The weather proved similar to that of the previous day, a good morning with fog coming down in the afternoon. *Maniola jurtina* L. and *Coenonympha pamphilus* L. were the only additional butterflies, both being common throughout the island. A single *Euphyia bilineata* L. was beaten from some bramble and we saw larvae of *Diataraxia oleracea* L. and *Cynia mendica* Clerck.

That evening I put my trap amongst some heather near a lake which had some reeds on the far side. As the weather was not too bad, I decided to stay for a while. I had not realised the implications of being almost on top of a great black-backed gull colony. These gulls made repeated close passes and in the dark on your own I can assure you it is a very frightening experience. When amidst a terrifying noise a gull landed on my head and then hopped on to the sheet, I decided to give up and returned to the chalet. The actual species I recorded in the morning were a bit disappointing but their numbers were surprising, for well over a hundred of both *P. glareosa* and *A. agathina* were present. It was interesting to find that the majority of both species were *f. rosea* Tutt; indeed, most species seemed to be brighter than those on the mainland. There were also a few additions to our previous records, the most interesting being *Eupithecia nanata* Hübn., *Hadena bicurris* Hufn., *Lygris testata* L., *Amphipyra tragopogonis* Clerck and *Rivula sericealis* Scop.; surprisingly for a light trap, *V. atalanta* was also present.

The 4th of September proved to be a nice warm day but,

although many butterflies were flying, nothing fresh of interest was seen. That night I decided to run the trap about three-quarters of a mile along the path leading to the Wick. I expected this to be a superb site and so it proved. The trap was placed in a small, sheltered valley, which was covered in a mass of heather, and close to a small dried-up pond. I wish I had stayed with the trap but the night was clear and I thought little of the chances of a good catch. Yet the fact that in the morning I found some 712 moths in the trap speaks for itself. There were well over 300 *A. agathina* and 200 *P. glareosa*, which for a small blacklight with a 6-watt actinic tube, is really incredible. There were some other nice species as well, including *Agrotis trux* Hübn., *Scopula conjugata* Borkh., *Cryphia muralis* Forst., *Heliothis armigera* Hübn., *Hadena rivularis* F. and *H. bicruris* Hufn. Like an idiot, I did not stay in this sheltered valley for my two remaining nights' trapping but moved to other sites I had previously chosen.

The following day was pretty miserable with fog materialising at regular intervals. The only highlight was when a very battered *Lyncometra ocellata* L. crawled out of my sleeping bag. That night I put the trap on a different path leading to the Wick. This was in a much exposed position with ferns as the main vegetation. Unfortunately I placed it in the middle of shearwater colony—with disastrous results as you will hear.

After setting the trap I decided for a change to walk round the island using a Tilley lamp and beating tray. At the Wick I paused to shine the light on a clump of ragwort and saw a fresh specimen of *Rhodomestra sacraria* L. feeding on the flower head. Shortly after this I netted a second but a third eluded me as it flew over a precipitous cliff. The rest of the walk was uneventful save for the capture of a second *A. trux*. After a restorative drink at the chalet, I went to look at the blacklight and found it surrounded by 30 young shearwaters. As I was only too well aware of the damage they could inflict, I kept guard over the trap for about an hour, but when the Tilley lamp went out I decided to retreat for it had turned cold and the dew was falling heavily.

In the morning I hardly recognised the trap for it was on its side with the contents spread all over the ground. The sheet was a crumpled mess and saturated with dew. To cap it all, the battery had gone flat! Though few moths remained, there was one interesting addition in *Eumichtis lichenea* Hübn. Still, from the 700 odd specimens of the previous night to sink below 50 was rather a disappointment. Luckily the warden had just obtained a generator from the mainland and he was kind enough to unpack it so that my battery could be recharged.

The 5th of September proved unfruitful, though the weather was good; only *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. and *Nymphalis io* L. were added to the week's list. That night I put the trap in a sheltered spot near High Cliff. It was slightly boggy, a mixture of ferns and bramble being the predominant vegetation. As a last-ditch effort I stayed with the trap the whole night, and



pretty unrewarding it proved. I removed one clumsy shearwater who seemed determined to knock the trap over and a fat frog which was busy eating all the moths as they came along. *Xanthorhoe spadicearia* D. & S. was the only addition, but there was a welcome second *E. lichenea*. The most striking feature was the total absence of any *A. agathina* despite the fact that the area of heather where it had been so numerous was only half a mile away. So even on a very small island it would have been easy to overlook this insect. *P. glareosa* on the other hand was prevalent throughout the island and was not restricted to the heather areas. *E. obelisca* was usually numerous at all the traps, as were *A. xanthomista* and *G. flavago*, all these moths generally regarded as being scarce. The occurrence of *V. atalanta* in plenty, several *R. saccharia* and a single *H. armigera* indicated that it was a good migratory year.

We left on the 6th of September after a most enjoyable five days. The fondest memories I shall have will not be of the moths but the shearwaters—stupid and annoying but so very appealing and charming. There is still a lot to be found on the island. We recorded 48 species and I hope we shall have some further successes when we go again in 1974. The only records of the area prior to my visit were made by a past warden who listed 94 species; this has now been increased to 110. If anyone has any records of the area I should be very grateful to have them for in the near future it may be possible to publish a list of the island's macrolepidoptera.

Finally, I would like to thank John Davies, the warden, and Dr. Bray of the Nature Conservancy for permission to collect in the reserve and for all their help and advice.

## Among the British Lepidoptera, 1973

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(concluded from page 44)

the following morning. Several females of *M. rubi* were early arrivals and showed a remarkable range of size. *Lycophotia porphyrea* D. & S. was common and other noteworthy species included *Mythimna pudorina* D. & S., *Boarmia roboraria* D. & S., *H. impluviata*, *C. pustulata* and a very late *M. abruptaria*. Little collecting was done the following week as we were preparing for our Continental holiday beginning 30th June.

Our return on 12th July was marked by warm but stormy conditions and the garden trap was the only source of moths at this time, with one specimen of *Plemyria rubiginata* D. & S. on the 15th being the best of a poor bunch. An evening trip to the Chilterns on the 18th produced 50 species of macro in rather cool, damp conditions. *D. blomeri* was fairly common